

# Cambodia

## Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2023



ភាគីដៃគូអប់រំសង្គមស្រីរដ្ឋាភិបាល  
NGO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP



■ Women with disabilities in a consultation to prepare awareness raising campaigns in Siem Reap Province

### I. Country Context

In Cambodia, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a severe economic downturn, deemed by the World Bank as the worst economic challenge faced by the country in 30 years. The apparel and tourism industries have been hit the hardest, with recovery yet to be seen. Unfortunately, this crisis has been used by the current leader to consolidate power, resulting in the elimination of political opposition and the monopolisation of power by a single party. Despite the challenges, civil society organisations (CSOs) have learned to navigate the narrow democratic space, although a law on “neutrality” has led to self-censorship and a focus on collaboration rather than criticism. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on education, causing disruptions and learning loss as families struggle to maintain their livelihoods.

The digital divide has been highlighted, with many students lacking access to the necessary technology for remote learning. The government has taken measures to respond, such as launching online learning platforms and providing financial assistance to vulnerable

families. However, there is a need for further investment in education and digital infrastructure to ensure that all students have access to quality education. Despite these, there have been some achievements in meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4, with an increase in net enrolment rates in primary education and a decrease in the gender gap in education. However, continued efforts are needed to ensure that all Cambodian children have access to education, especially in these challenging times.

Overall, there has been an upward trend in the adjusted net attendance rate at all three education levels. The adjusted net attendance rate increased from 91.9% to 94.5% in primary education, 51.5% to 57.2% in lower secondary education, and 25.7% to 33.8% in upper secondary education. These differences in the adjusted net attendance rate are all statistically significant. However, there is a large gap in adjusted net attendance between children with and without disabilities. For instance, the adjusted net attendance in primary education was 34.7% for children with disabilities and 95.0% for children without disabilities. The adjusted net attendance

in lower and upper secondary education were 13.3% and 0.0%, respectively, for children with disabilities, and 57.5% and 34.1%, respectively, for children without disabilities. While the sample size of children with disabilities is small and requires some caution, it is still evident that they are among the most disadvantaged groups in terms of school participation.<sup>1</sup>

### II. The Localisation of SDG 4 in Cambodia

Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) for 2019-2023 prioritises the development of human resources to drive economic growth and competitiveness. Education plays a crucial role in achieving Cambodia's goal of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2050. To this end, the 2019-2023 Education Strategic Plan (ESP) has been developed to improve human resources and infrastructure, in line with the national vision and goals.

1 Cambodia SDG4 Benchmark Indicator Analysis  
Analysis of Sustainable Development Goal 4  
Benchmark Indicators in Cambodia using CSES  
2014 – 2019





■ NEP members at the Annual General Meeting 2023

The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) has created Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap to translate global goals into specific actions, which the ESP uses for targets and strategies. A mid-term review of SDG 4 progress is planned for 2023, halfway through the timeline in July 2022. Cambodia has committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, including SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The government has implemented various policies and programmes to achieve this goal, such as the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 and the National TVET Policy 2017-2025. Continued efforts to achieve SDG 4 have been made through wide national consultations towards the preparation of the National Statement of Commitment for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. These consultations have been undertaken through existing policy dialogue and sector planning platforms and mechanisms, including government platforms and mechanisms.

The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) organised an annual education sector review called "Education Congress" in March 2022. This provided an opportunity for a variety of education stakeholders, including all relevant ministries, development partners, civil society organisations, teachers, and school directors to come together to discuss sector achievements and challenges. Concrete policy actions were identified, particularly in the context of post-COVID-19 learning recovery. These priorities include early grade learning, teacher development reform, digital education, promotion of school health,

and increased financing for education and skills.

MoEYS also undertook a mid-term review (MTR) of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 to assess progress in the first two and a half years of implementation. The MTR assessed the relevance and effectiveness of the reforms and strategies implemented, revised priorities, strategies, indicators, and targets of the ESP in light of the results of the review and emerging issues and priorities, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and updated the financing plan. The Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) organised a budget consultation workshop, and the budget negotiation process has been ongoing.

Of the 10 global targets for quality education, Cambodia picked up seven, making it one of the goals most comprehensively adopted in the Cambodian SDGs (CSDGs). It has gone even further with the indicators – Cambodia has identified 18, where there are only 11 indicators in the global framework for SDG 4.

Cambodia carried over the most underachieved C-MDGs around, for example, primary school completion rates, but also added new goals around access to early childhood education and tertiary education.

#### Means of Implementation for SDG 4 in Cambodia

Cambodia tended not to adopt targets which it perceives are not within its control, so the SDG means of implementation target of expanding the number of scholarships available to residents of least-developed countries is not included in the CSDGs. In cooperation with government agencies, UNESCO, NGOs and other development stakeholders, the Ministry of Labour

and Vocational Training and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) joined forces to develop several initiatives in education. They include improving the quality of education, the introduction of better salaries and work conditions for teachers, and accomplishing reforms in vocational training programmes and the evaluation system.<sup>2</sup>

Initiatives such as "BEEP", an ICT-based programme for basic education equivalency, is an example of the results of MoEYS's cooperation with other entities. For the improvement of education facilities, MoEYS will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD).<sup>3</sup> The Cambodian Industrial Development Policy acknowledges the importance of the development of technical knowledge and skills in the workforce.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, published in April 2014 a policy on Higher Education Vision 2030, envisioning and connecting targets for the implementation of SDG 4.<sup>5</sup>

#### Features of monitoring SDG 4 targets in Cambodia

In Cambodia, the education data management and structure are under the Department of Non-Formal Education of MoEYS (NFE-MIS), the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (TVET-MIS) and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) of the Ministry of Planning (MPP).<sup>6</sup> The

2 The Phnom Penh Post 2017. "Literacy target of a Sustainable Development Goal". Accessed 15 March 2019.

3 Kingdom of Cambodia 2018. op. cit.

4 Royal Government of Cambodia 2015. "Cambodia Industrial Development Policy 2015-2017". Accessed 15 March 2019.

5 Kingdom of Cambodia Nation Religion King 2014. "Policy on Higher Education Youth and Sport". Accessed 15 March 2019.

6 Pitin 2017. "Monitoring SDG4-Education 2030 in Cambodia". Accessed 15 March 2019.

agency responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of all CSDG 4 targets and indicators is MoEYS. In some cases, MoEYS will cooperate with other government agencies.<sup>7</sup>

Target 4.3 (gender balance of tertiary education enrolments) is monitored by MoEYS and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Art (MCFA).

In the case of target 4.a (building and upgrading education facilities), MoEYS and the Ministry for Rural Development (MRD) are involved.<sup>8</sup>

Cambodia established a target of 83.9% completion rate in primary education in 2018 (CSDG, 2019), and 91.1% completion rate in 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). According to the C-VNR (2019), Cambodia completed elementary education at 86.1% in 2019, and 87.4% in 2021 (Education Congress, 2021). And it was 87.3% of the primary education completion rate (EMIS, 2021). The lack of school preparation for most young children, a teacher shortage in rural locations, a lack of infrastructure,

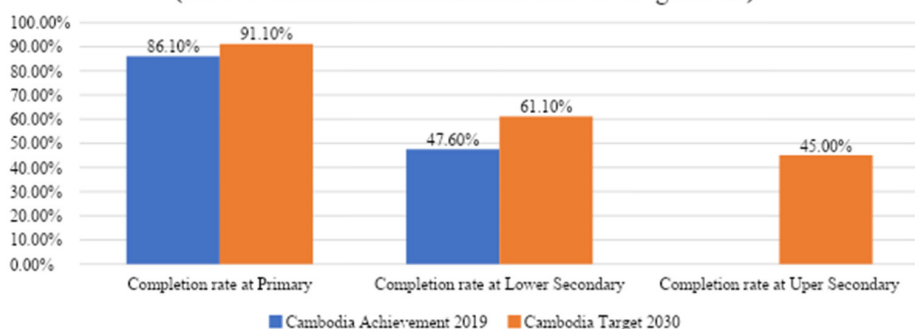
Strategic Plan for Secondary Education Sub-sector 2021-2030 - collect all inputs, education quality reform, equity, and quality education service reform to restore and raise the completion rate to meet the C-SDG 4 objective of 2030. The key challenges that the MOEYS needs to overcome are the low quality of learning outcomes, high dropout rates in lower and upper secondary school, and the lack of qualified teachers in rural and remote areas.

4.5 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

In 2018, the CSDG 4 adult literacy rate (15+ years) was set at 82.5%. As a consequence, CSDG 4 was completed 82.5% in 2017 (CVNR, 2019) and 88% in 2021 (MoEYS Education Congress). The MoEYS established the Non-Formal (NFE) policy, which has been in place since 2002, to establish important non-formal education priorities in order to provide functional literacy for kids and adults in elementary and lower secondary equivalency programmes. The notion of lifelong learning is a critical component of SDG 4 of the 2030 Framework, which was re-emphasised in the Incheon commitment (RGC 2019).

However, some issues persist, the lack of community and learner participation in CLCs and similar institutions, insufficient physical infrastructures and conducive environments, a shortage of human resources, a lack of information dissemination, and the unattractiveness of training programmes are all pressing issues in adult education. Other impediments include participants' uncertain professional options, insufficient finance, family pressures, a lack of dedication and ownership, conventional culture and attitudes that place less emphasis on learning, and low living standards. Without their meaningful involvement and participation, efforts to promote adult education will be ineffective, causing learning institutions to close. Another unresolved issue is developing realistic

Percentage of Completion Rate at Primary and Secondary Education (SDG 4: Cambodia Achievement 2019 vs Target 2030)



### Key challenges include ECCE, Non-Formal and Life-long learning, and Quality of Primary and Secondary Education

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

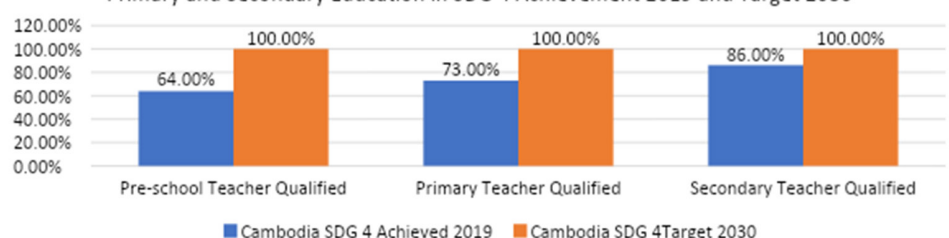
According to the Education Congress of 2021, Cambodia attained 61.1%. Preschool enrolment rose by 2%, from 4,493 (FY 2020–2021) to 4,563 (FY 2021–2022). This demonstrated that the early childhood education service reacted to the National Policy on Early Child Care and Development fairly and that it was well-prepared for receiving education at the primary level. RGC published the National Plan for Early Childhood Development, but no provincial plans had been created, exacerbating the lack of access to supporting infrastructure for converting community kindergarten into an annex to public schooling settings.

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

such as internet connectivity and technological devices, and a lack of accessible and clean WASH facilities in schools all offer significant problems. According to EMIS statistics, the dropout rate in primary school is 7.2%, 16.6% in lower secondary school, and 18.5% in upper secondary school, push and pull factors such as migration, the need to support families with income, early marriage cause this drop to occur as children grow up.

Lower and upper secondary education are distinct levels of secondary education. Cambodia's lower secondary education completion rate was set at 61.1% in 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). Cambodia will have completed 48.1% of lower secondary education by 2021 (Education Congress, 2021). Cambodia has established a completion rate of 45% in upper secondary education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). According to EMIS (2021), Cambodia accomplished 31.1% of the upper secondary education completion rate. In response to the issues, MoEYS (2021) established the

Percentage of Teachers Qualified According to National Standard of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education in SDG 4 Achievement 2019 and Target 2030



7 Kingdom of Cambodia 2018. op. cit.

8 Ibid



rules and standards for effectively implementing adult education, as well as increasing human resources and research in the sector.

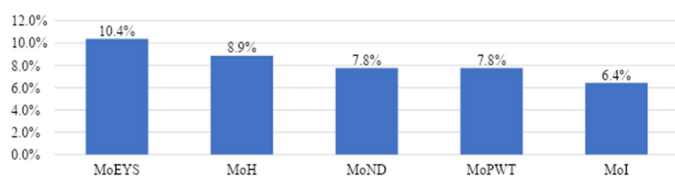
### III. Overview of the Situation on Education Financing

The comparison of the total budget spent for MoEYS in 2022 is lower than in 2019 (10.4% compared to 13.7%). The percentage of the total budget spent for MoEYS has not reached the global benchmark of 20% of the total national budget. The total budget spent in 2022 for the MoEYS indicates a promising increase in the ECCE sub-sector, however, primary and non-formal sub-sector financing continues to be low.

It was a big challenge that the MoEYS needed more budget allocation from the government and budget support from implementing partners, but the budget was decreased by both. The MoEYS planned for budget support from DP of around USD 211 million in 2021 for strengthening education quality after COVID-19. The budget support contributes to the education systems transformation and attempts to get on track with SDG 4 targets for 2025 and 2030.

### IV. Civil Society Engagement in the SDG 4 Implementation, Follow-up, and Monitoring

CSOs in Cambodia have actively engaged the government at the national, provincial, community, and school levels. NEP also supported local NGOs' engagement in the Provincial Education Sector Working Group. Many of the NGOs involved in the PESWG are themselves service providers and experts in their own field eg. training



■ NEP members participate in the quarterly meeting of provincial CSO groups

for youth with disabilities and education for children with special needs. One notable engagement has been the implementation of WASH in the schools where the NGOs were active.

### V. Recommendations to MOEYS, Development Partners, CSOs

- To increase the national budget on education to meet the Incheon Commitment 20% of the total national budget spent (19.3% in 2025 and 20% and spending level of 4-6% of GDP in 2030) by prioritising education financing and viewing education as an investment.
- To prioritise addressing pandemic-related and previously sustained learning loss due to social inequality, the digital divide, and the quality of education after the school closure but also in remote and rural areas, non-formal learning settings for children, youths, and adults of all genders. To support and encourage the participation of citizens, civil society and community-based organisations in the generation of monitoring data, and development of recommendations to national and local governments.
- To adequately coordinate policy dialogue between civil society and governments would allow to engage and connect directly with citizens, which further helps to improve transparency and accountability of government. Moreover, the provincial and local coordination and effective data collection have the potential to fill knowledge gaps in national SDG monitoring and review, particularly regarding insufficient information on marginalised groups. The evidence gathered from provincial and local levels could be used to produce policy recommendations for decision-makers and public service providers at the national level.
- To increase financing for the Non-Formal Education sub-sector to address the current situation of adult education in Cambodia, which remains stagnant and is wracked with loopholes. The government and relevant stakeholders should take immediate action to shore up financing for the sub-sector.
- To invest (financial and technical support) in strengthening the monitoring at the provincial level, support local and CSOs working with most marginalised learners to adequately collect their data, as they carry a significant amount of evidence from the most marginalised learners that are not fully accounted for in the assessment of the achievement of C-SDG implementation. •



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Established in 2002, **NGO Education Partnership (NEP)** is a membership organization with 128 membership organisations (72 Local NGOs and 52 International NGOs). NEP's mandate is to provide coordination and capacity development on sub-national and local levels and representation for its members on national platforms such as the Education Sector Working Group, sub-sector/thematic working groups (Early Childhood Care and Development, Primary Education, Non-Formal Education, and Inclusive Education) and Budget Working Group (education financing). CSOs, development partners, and other education sector stakeholders continue to require coordination and communications support for all forms of research, sub-national and national policy monitoring, support joint advocacy and engagement of actors working in vocational training, non-formal education, inclusive education, equivalency program, and life skills. NEP Cambodia is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).

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